

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, CO
SUBJ: POLITICAL SUMMARIES: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. LIBERAL CANDIDATE TURBAY WAS THE APPARENT VICTOR IN THE JUNE 4 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, BUT THE CONSERVATIVES ARE CHALLENGING THIS VICTORY IN THE ROUTINE REVIEW OF THE CLOSE VOTE COUNT. OFFICIALS OF THE TWO LEFTIST LABOR CONFEDERATIONS WILL ATTEND THE ILO GENEVA MEETING FOR THE FIRST TIME AS MEMBERS OF COLOMBIA'S LABOR DELEGATION. THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN HOLDING TALKS WITH SEVERAL UNIONS WHICH ARE DEMANDING GREATER BENEFITS IN VIEW OF THE CONTINUING INFLATION. THE ELECTIONS WERE RELATIVELY PEACEFUL BUT SUBSEQUENT, UNRELATED ACTS OF VIOLENCE HAVE DISRUPTED THE PUBLIC ORDER.
END SUMMARY.

2. POST ELECTORAL PERIOD UNCERTAIN BUT CALM. LIBERAL CANDIDATE TURBAY'S SLENDER APPARENT VICTORY OVER CONSERVATIVE BETANCUR IN THE JUNE 4 PRESIDENTIAL
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ELECTION, AND THE CONSERVATIVES' DETERMINATION TO CONTEST IT, HAVE CREATED UNCERTAINTY WHICH WILL NOT BE DISPELLED UNTIL THE NORMAL VOTE RECOUNTING PROCEDURE HAS RUN ITS COURSE AND THE ELECTORAL COURT PROCLAIMS THE OFFICIAL WINNER. THIS WILL PROBABLY NOT BE BEFORE 3 OR 4 WEEKS FOLLOWING THE ELECTION (BOGOTA 5408). THE LATEST OFFICIAL RETURNS HAVE INCREASED TURBAY'S LEAD TO ABOUT 140,000 VOTES

(BOGOTA 5445) AND SOME CONSERVATIVES HAVE BEGUN TO ACKNOWLEDGE OPENLY TURBAY'S ELECTION. BETANCUR HAS REFUSED TO CONCEDE, HOWEVER, AND THOSE CLOSEST TO HIM HAVE SAID THAT THEY WILL SEEK OUT SUSPECTED FRAUD AND ERROR DURING THE RECOUNT. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH TURBAY'S PRESENT MARGIN OVER HIS RIVAL IS NOT A COMFORTABLE ONE, IT IS NOW HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT CASE OF FRAUD COULD BE DISCOVERED IN SUFFICIENT NUMBER TO COST TURBAY THE PRESIDENCY. THE HOLD-OUT CONSERVATIVES HAVE INDICATED THAT THEY WILL ABIDE BY THE OUTCOME OF THE LEGALLY PRESCRIBED RECOUNT PROCESS. AN IMPORTANT PURPOSE OF THE CONSERVATIVE CHALLENGE AT THIS POINT MAY BE, BY THREATENING A DELAY IN THE RECOUNT PROCESS AND IN TURBAY'S OFFICIAL DECLARATION AS PRESIDENT-ELECT, TO BRING HIM TO THE BARGAINING TABLE WITH THE CONSERVATIVES TO REACH A SPECIFIC AGREEMENT ON CONSERVATIVE PARTICIPATION IN TURBAY'S GOVERNMENT. TURBAY HAS ALREADY STATED HIS GENERAL WILLINGNESS TO GIVE CONSERVATIVES AN IMPORTANT ROLE (BOGOTA 5344).

3. LEFTISTS JOIN ILO DELEGATION; TEACHERS STRIKE. THE GOC NAMED THE PRESIDENTS OF ALL FOUR OF THE MAJOR LABOR CONFEDERATIONS AS COLOMBIA'S LABOR DELEGATES TO THIS MONTH'S MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION (ILO) IN GENEVA. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COMMUNIST CSTC AND THE LEFTIST CGT HAVE FORMED PART OF COLOMBIA'S OFFICIAL DELEGATION. THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DECISION TO INCLUDE THE LEFTISTS WAS BASED ON THE GOC'S TACIT RECOGNITION OF THE NATIONAL LABOR COUNCIL FORMED BY THE FOUR CONFEDERATIONS LAST SEPTEMBER. IN OTHER LABOR-RELATED ACTIVITIES, THE NATIONAL TEACHERS' FEDERATION (FECODE) HELD A 24-HOUR STRIKE ON JUNE 8 TO DEMAND BACK WAGES AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM. ANOTHER WORK STOPPAGE BY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES WAS AVERTED WHEN THE MINISTRY OF LABOR REACHED AN AGREEMENT ON SALARIES AND BENEFITS WITH THAT SECTOR'S PRINCIPAL UNION.

4. INFLATION RATE UP SLIGHTLY IN MAY. ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL GOC STATISTICS, THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX (CPI) INCREASED AT A SLIGHTLY HIGHER SEASONALLY ADJUSTED ANNUAL RATE IN MAY, BUT THE 1978 YEARLY INCREASE STILL PROMISES TO BE SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER THAN IN 1977. DURING MAY, THE CPI ROSE APPROXIMATELY 18 PERCENT ON AN ANNUAL BASIS COMPARED TO A 16 PERCENT ANNUAL RATE INCREASE BETWEEN JANUARY AND MAY. ON AN ABSOLUTE BASIS, PRICES WERE APPROXIMATELY 10.5 PERCENT HIGHER AT THE END OF MAY THAN IN DECEMBER 1977. PRICES INCREASED AT A HIGHER RATE FOR BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS IN COMPARISON WITH THOSE FOR WHITE-COLLAR EMPLOYEES.

5. ELECTION DAY CALM FOLLOWED BY UNRELATED DISORDERS.
ELECTION DAY PASSED WITHOUT ANY MAJOR VIOLENT INCIDENTS,
ALTHOUGH THE PEDRO LEON ARBOLEDA URBAN TERRORIST GROUP
CLAIMED CREDIT FOR SEVERAL MINOR BOMBINGS IN BOGOTA.
A BOGOTA INDUSTRIALIST WAS RESCUED FROM HIS KIDNAPPERS ON
JUNE 4 BY THE NATIONAL POLICE (F2) WHO ALSO CAPTURED OR
KILLED THE MEMBERS OF THE CRIMINAL GANG RESPONSIBLE.
INCIDENTS OF STUDENT DISORDERS DROPPED AS THE NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY WAS CLOSED INDEFINITELY, ALTHOUGH PERSONS
COMMEMORATING THE DEATHS OF PAST STUDENT DEMONSTRATORS
BURNED ANOTHER BUS IN DOWNTOWN BOGOTA AND STONED TWO
CARS FROM OTHER DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS ON JUNE 8.
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